

Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities



BCEmployment
and Assistance

Assistance | Opportunity | Independence  **BRITISH COLUMBIA**
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A Framework for Action

The Ministry of Human Resources envisions a province in which those British Columbians in need are assisted to achieve their social and economic potential. The Ministry is developing an employment strategy for persons with disabilities. Partnership and cooperation is essential to the success of the strategy. Over the next months the ministry will engage partners and stakeholders in developing the specifics of the strategy and moving it into implementation.

Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities

Assistance / Opportunity / Independence

A successful strategy for improving independence for persons with disabilities must consider the full spectrum of programs, services and supports required to address the varying needs of persons with disabilities. It should recognize that individuals experience disabilities in different degrees and at different stages of their lives, and that their needs will vary over time.

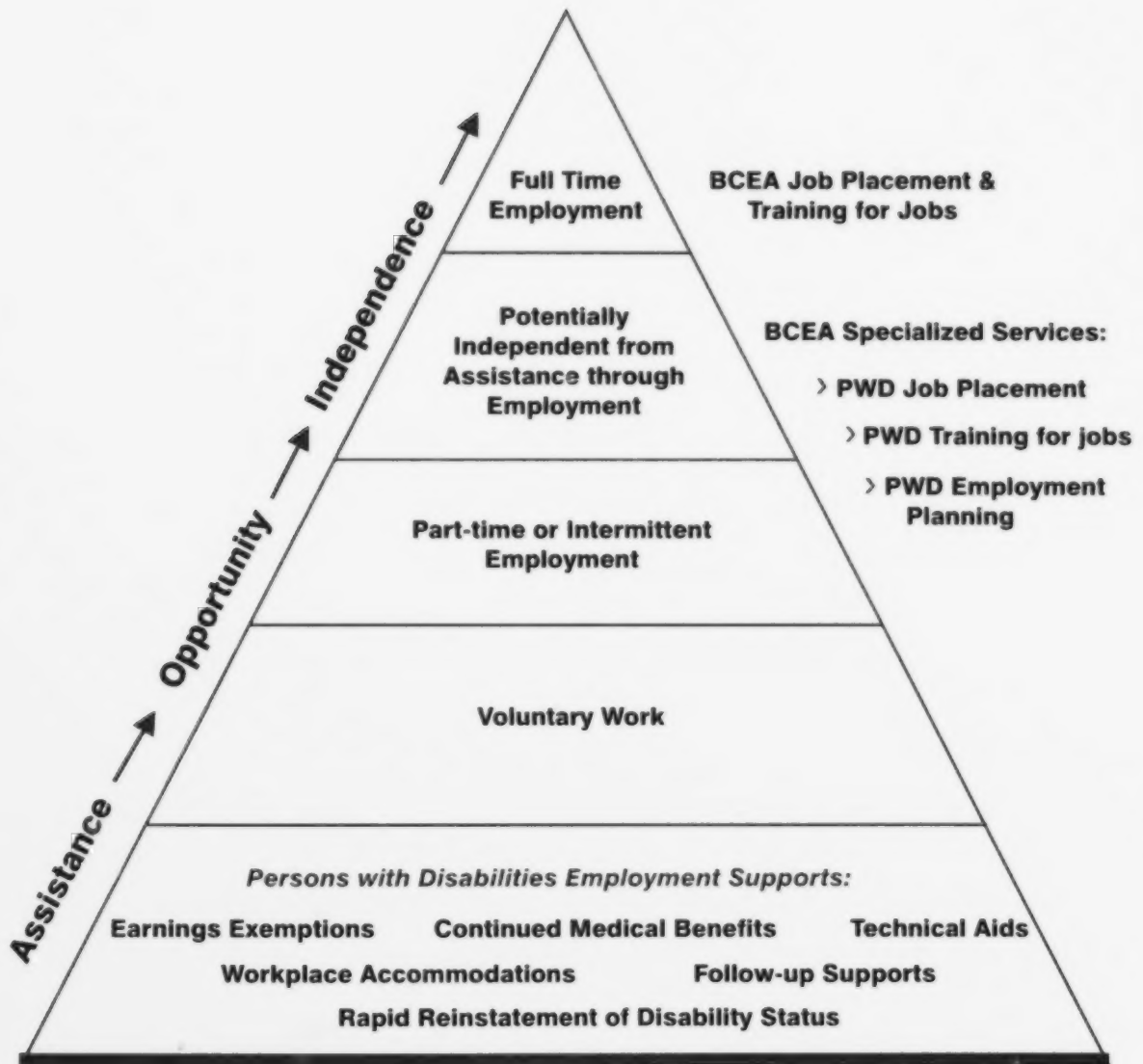
The BC Employment and Assistance program requires a new approach for persons with disabilities. Under the new Employment Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (ESPD), programs are being redesigned and adapted to address the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. These programs must also reflect the principles of self-sufficiency and active participation of individuals in reaching their economic and social potential.

Persons with disabilities have access to the employment programs available to all BC Employment and Assistance clients, as well as access to specialized programs designed for persons with disabilities.

At the same time, some persons with disabilities need the security provided by income assistance. With this foundation of security they can achieve more independence. Under BC Employment and Assistance, new eligibility criteria and income treatment help persons with disabilities achieve as much independence as possible.

Persons with disabilities need access to a range of services that will help them prepare for work. This client group varies in the amount they can work and the degree to which they can become self-reliant. Some, with minimal support, can work full-time and become financially independent, while others may only be able to work part-time, requiring ongoing ministry assistance. The relationship of the BC Employment and Assistance program for persons with disabilities to a client's needs is shown in the following diagram.

BC Employment & Assistance for Persons with Disabilities



Assistance

The barriers to employment faced by persons with disabilities are reflected by their representation in the labour market. The unemployment rate for persons with disabilities is double that of persons without disabilities.

Despite that outcome, many persons with disabilities want the opportunity to work so they can lead independent lives.

These outcomes also suggest that a fair and secure foundation is needed so that persons with disabilities can take part in training and employment. For some, BC Employment and Assistance is a starting point for moving to a greater level of independence and self-reliance. For others, BC Employment and Assistance will be an ongoing part of their involvement in the labour market.

Under BC Employment and Assistance, a set of policies and services assures persons with disabilities that their efforts will be supported regardless of their ability to become independent through employment.

Earnings Exemptions

Persons with disabilities will be able to earn up to \$300 per month, in addition to their disability assistance. These exempted earnings can help defer some work expenses as individuals move toward greater self-reliance and independence through employment.

Continued Medical Benefits

While receiving disability assistance, persons with disabilities are eligible for basic and enhanced health benefits, including medical, dental, optical and other medical equipment and supplies. When a person with a disability leaves BC Employment and Assistance for a job, he or she continues to be eligible for enhanced health benefits.

Technical Aids

Often persons with disabilities need technical aids, devices and other supports to prepare for and participate in the workplace. Technical aids may be as simple as a tape recorder, or may be more sophisticated adapted computer technology for visually impaired or blind persons. Technical aid needs and options can also change depending on the disability and the activity of the individual. For this reason, a flexible and responsive technical aids service is needed to respond efficiently and effectively to an individual's changing employment needs.

Workplace Accommodations

Persons with disabilities may require special accommodations in the workplace and this can impact their employment prospects. Many people with disabilities can participate in the workplace with no additional supports or modifications. However, for those who need modifications, workplace barriers can prevent them from getting or keeping a job.

Employers and persons with disabilities will be supported to ensure that workplace accommodations are provided when the need is reasonable and the accommodation is feasible. Involving the employee in the process is a key element to the success of this approach. Accommodations could include:

- ☐ Assistive technologies
- ☐ Adapted furniture
- ☐ Office modifications
- ☐ Low-tech devices
- ☐ Customized software

Follow-up Supports

Persons with disabilities may take longer than other employees to adjust to a workplace environment. Changes in the workplace can also affect persons with disabilities more than they might other employees.

Follow-up services will be provided to those persons who need extra time or supports to manage their work duties and become stable in their job. Job coaches will be used in situations where an individual needs longer-term "supported employment" opportunities.

Rapid reinstatement of disability status

If a person with a disability leaves BC Employment and Assistance for a job, but is unable to continue in employment, he or she can return to BC Employment and Assistance. If financially eligible, the person can be reinstated to benefits immediately. Individuals will not have to reapply for disability status to reestablish their eligibility for disability assistance.

Opportunity

To ensure persons with disabilities have access to the existing and emerging job market, it is essential they have the required skills.

Integral components of the employment strategy include skills that can be gained or improved through volunteer placements and opportunities for persons with severe disabilities to be involved in the labour market to the greatest degree possible.

Opportunities to access basic education and skills development, job-specific training, and/or post-secondary education are also needed.

Employment planning services

Persons with disabilities often have more limited employment options than non-disabled persons. Successful transition to employment requires careful planning based on reliable information about the individual, their disability and the job market. A realistic employment goal must be identified so that persons with disabilities can receive appropriate support to find a job and become financially independent.

Employment Planning Services provides a guided, step-by-step approach to assessment, identifying an employment goal, and then developing and implementing a plan to reach the goal. People who know the local resources and labour market, and who understand disabilities and assessment processes will deliver planning services.

Persons wishing to explore self-employment will have the opportunity to do so. Most entrepreneurs find that their new ventures require careful research, sound planning, determination and energy. There are those who are successful who believe that the personal rewards are worth it. Individuals will be referred to organizations that will help eligible clients explore self-employment as a viable employment option.

Training for Jobs

Persons with disabilities are often disadvantaged in the labour market through a lack of marketable skills. Specific skill training can "level the playing field" for a person with a disability wishing to enter the labour market. Delivery of training will include formal and informal settings, institutional, on-the-job, and short-term training done in consultation with business and industry to respond to specific skill demands.

Persons with disabilities who opt for an employment-focused post-secondary education program will continue to have ministry support while applying to Student Financial Assistance for their direct education/training costs. The BC Student Financial Assistance program provides a range of supports in the form of grants, assistance and loans for students with disabilities wishing to attend post-secondary education.

Independence

Job Placement

The ministry supports the efforts of persons with disabilities to increase their employability and independence to the greatest possible degree. To accommodate this objective, a range of job placement resources are available. They include access to the "mainstream" Job Placement program, with appropriate supports to allow a person with disabilities to take full advantage of the program.

As well, there will be specific job placement services for persons with disabilities, which could include:

- Mentoring and job shadowing: opportunities to experience various workplace settings.
- Work experience: preparation for employment in a particular area of work
- Assisted Job Search: job search tools, skills and supports.
- Job Development: identifying appropriate job opportunities.
- Marketing and Placement: direct referral of individuals to job openings.

Partnerships

Roundtable on Employment for Persons with Disabilities

Partnership and cooperation between government, persons with disabilities, community-based organizations, employers and other stakeholders are key to the success of an employment strategy for persons with disabilities. The goal to improve the employment situation for persons with disabilities in British Columbia requires an understanding by all partners of their role and responsibility in achieving that goal. To this end, a Minister's Roundtable on Employment for Persons with Disabilities will be established. Roundtable objectives include: creating awareness among business and community leaders about barriers, opportunities and best practices; improving linkages between stakeholders; identifying skills shortages; and helping government develop programs to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Partnership with Human Resources Development Canada

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is a strategic partner with the Ministry of Human Resources in funding and delivering employment services for persons with disabilities in B.C. In addition to cost-sharing services under the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) Agreement, HRDC coordinates with B.C. to reduce any duplication of services delivered by the two levels of governments.

Partnership and cooperation between the Ministry of Human Resources and Human Resources Development Canada along with persons with disabilities, community-based organizations, employers and other stakeholders will contribute to an effective labour market strategy for persons with disabilities in B.C.

Summary

Under BC Employment and Assistance, opportunities exist for persons with disabilities to take advantage of emerging labour market demands and needs. Over the next few years, well-trained, adaptable workers will be in high demand in order to meet the ever-evolving opportunities being created by technological change and the global economy. As members of the baby boom generation begin to retire in large numbers, it is expected that employers will have an increasing need to recruit and retain skilled employees.

From a human capital perspective, there is a significant cost attached to excluding a sizeable portion of potentially productive individuals from the labour force. There is also an enormous social cost attached to not supporting the full potential of individuals. Addressing the employment situation of persons with disabilities can play a key role in maximizing independence, ensuring income security, and enhancing well being, thus promoting the participation of persons with disabilities as full citizens.

